United Nations A/HRC/26/NGO/95

General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 June 2014

English only

Human Rights Council
Twenty-sixth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.14-04452 (E)
1404452

Please recycle

Situation of Journalists in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Shutting down newspapers and periodicals, arresting journalists, bloggers and even ordinary users of social media sites like facebook, blocking internet sites, controlling internet service providers, cyber attacks and observing and restricting communications are still regular methods in the Islamic Republic of Iran. While the new president had promised to implement extensive changes and release political prisoners including journalists, these promises have not been translated into action.

Newspapers and periodicals are banned and journalists arrested at the discretion of the Committee for the Supervision of the Press, which is answerable to the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. These bans and arrests happen either through a declaration of crime by the Public Prosecutor or a complaint of private individuals via the courts.

Iran's Cyber Police, which was launched in January 2011 under the aegis of Esmail Ahmadi Moghaddam, the commander of the police forces and the Revolutionary Guards, who are a military structure for protecting borders and guarding the intelligence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, belong to the parallel structures above national law that are responsible for arresting and cracking down on journalists.

The murder of Sattar Beheshti, a blogger who was killed under torture at the detention centre of the Cyber Police, or the recent interrogations of Amir Mohammad (Seraj) Mir Damady at the hands of persons very close to the Revolutionary Guards, are only a few instances of the role played by such structures.

The present report looks at the detention or conviction of 29 media activists and the ban of 7 periodicals, newspapers and online publications by various structures. These constitute the most important showcases of the lack of safety faced by journalists in Iran during since June 2013.

1) In spite of Hasan Ruhani's promises, Mehdi Mahmudian, Bahman Ahmad Amu'i, Mohammad Davari, Mas'ud Bastani, Ahmad Zeydabadi, Siamak Ghaderi are among the well-known journalists still imprisoned in Iran five years after the 2009 elections. Their charges include criticising the economic actions of the state, reporting on election incidents or preparing reports on crimes committed in detention centres like Kahrizak.[1]

2) On 13 July 2013, seven staff members of the site "Majzuban-e Nur" were given sentences of seven to eight years of prison and a five-year ban on any kind of political and media-related activity at branch 15 of the Islamic Revolutionary Court under charges like "spreading anti-state propaganda, insulting the Supreme Leader and working to disrupt the public order."[2]

Two of them (Mostafa Daneshju and Hamid Reza Mordadi), who are gravely ill, have not been allowed access to medical care facilities or to medical centres outside the prison.[3]

In May 2013, these imprisoned journalists, especially Omid Behruzi, were severely beaten and injured in the course of an attack of the special prison guard on ward 350.

The activities of these 7 journalists on the site "Majzuban-e Nur" were part of the reporting on Darvish Gonabadi.[4]

3) In November 2013, Khosrow and Mas'ud Kordpur, the directors of the Mukarian news agency, were sentenced in the Islamic Revolutionary Court Mehabad, presided over by judge Javadi Kia to, respectively, 6 years of prison (Khosrow) in Tabriz and 2 years of exile and 3.5 years of prison (Mas'ud).

These sentences were issued for charges of "war against God", "corruption on earth," spreading anti-state propaganda, insulting the Supreme Leader and disseminating lies: charges which have clearly been disproved for both brothers.

The activities of the Mukarian agency were the subject of a report on human rights violations in Western and Eastern Azarbaijan.

4) In December 2013, the website "Narenji" reported the detention of Ali Asghar Honarmand, Abbas Vahedi, Alireza Vaziri, Nasim Nikmehr, Maliheh Nakh'I, Mohammad Hosein Musazadeh and Sara Sajjadpur, some of its technical staff

and writers, at the hands of the Revolutionary Guards. This news item was soon after removed from the site's front page and the site's activities were shut down altogether.

The news analysis site "Narenji" was among the few technology sites in Persian to introduce digital products in addition to technology-related news and information.

5) On 23 November 2013, the public prosecutor of Rafsanjan announced to the official news agency Fars that eight individuals (seven women and one man) had been arrested for what he called spreading offensive matters in virtual space and insulting the people's religious sensibilities and Islamic values. Without mentioning identities and names, he stressed that the activity of those who, by way of virtual space, intend to undermine the convictions of the people and flout Islamic values, will be closely surveyed and harshly treated.[5]

6) On 16 February 2014, the website "Ipna News" was blocked at the order of the working group for determining the criteria of criminal contents. This site is unavailable for having published news on the demonstrations of Bakhtiaris and Lors in some Southern cities.

The protesters had called part of the dialogue in a TV series broadcast by Iran's state television an insult to general As'ad Bakhtiari, one of the leaders and national heroes of the Constitutional Revolution. Mohsen Haydari, the site's editor, is being prosecuted by the judiciary for covering the protests.[6]

7) On 4 March 2014, "Bahar" was the first newspaper to be shut down under the government of Hasan Ruhani. The ban will last for six months and was pronounced because of an article by Ali Asghar Gharavi, one of the responsibles of the Freedom Movement of Iran, by order of the Committee for the Supervision of the Press. Gharavi's case has been submitted to the judicial authorities.[7]

Before the newspaper was shut down, Sa'id Purazizi, editor-in-chief, was detained for two days and Ali Asghar Gharavi, after being summoned by the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Isfahan, detained for one month before he was eventually released for a bail of 200 million Tuman.

"Shutting down a newspaper for publishing an article by a writer, is not only an oppression of the writer him- or herself but a redoubled oppression for the rest of the staff, who had no influence on the publication of the article. Losing their jobs makes the burden of earning a living in Iran even heavier than before."

8) In March 2014, the newspaper "Aseman" was shut down. The head of the prosecutor's office for culture and media pronounced the crime to have been "matters in violation of Islamic standards and offending the sacred beliefs of Islam." The editor-in-chief was also prosectued.

In its 18 February 2014 issue, "Aseman" had criticised the verdict of retaliation and called it an "inhumane" sentence.[8]

9) In March 2014, the prosecutor's office for culture shut down the "Ebtekar" newspaper for "spreading lies."

The editors of the newspaper are accused of publishing a headline entitled "Head of Bureau of Prisons Dismissed." According to the prosecutor's office for culture, the head of the Bureau of Prisons was not dismissed but transferred.

The newspaper was shut down after its extended coverage of the assault of the special guard on ward 350 and the beating of prisoners.

At the same time, the head of Iran's judiciary ordered the public prosecutor in Tehran and public prosecutors across the country to apply severe force against what he called "incitement, spreading lies and disrupting national security."

He referred to the news coverage of the assault on ward 350 at Evin prison by certain national media.[9]

10) On 7 May 2014, the newspaper "Ghanun" was shut down by the public prosecutor's office in Tehran for what was announced as the "publication of untruths with the aim of alarming the populace and for the publication of matters that are contrary to Islamic standards."

"Ghanun" was shut down after the publication of a news item entitled "General Mohammad Ruyanian Released for a 100 Billion Bail."

Mohammad Ruyanian, deputy investigator of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, former executive director of Persepolis F.C. and former executive director of the National Transport and Energy Board, had earlier been arrested on financial charges.[10]

After less than three days, the website "Ghanun Online" was also made unavailable at the order of the prosecutor for culture and media.[11]

11) On 30 April 2014, Amir Mohammad (Seraj) Mir Damady was arrested after his most recent summons to the second interrogation branch of the prosecutor at Evin prison.
After president's invitation to expatriate Iranians, Mr MirDamady returned from Paris to Tehran, however, the Iranian judiciary arrested him on charges of anti-state propaganda and conspiracy.[12]

Hosein Mirdamady, the father of Sarraj MirDamady, announced in an interview with media that judge Salavati had told his son that they were going to treat him in such a way as to deter expatriate Iranians from returning.[13]

Shortly before, at the seventeenth meeting of the Human Rights Council, he had presented a report on the situation of imprisoned journalists in Iran.

Iran has ratified the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights. Based on Article 19 of the Convention and on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Iran is committed to observe freedom of speech. Likewise, Items 23 and 24 of the Iranian Constitution, respectively, obligate the government to observe freedom of opinion and freedom of speech in the media.

Based on its international commitments and on national law, Iran must thus end the oppression and arrest of media activists and take urgent action with regard to the freedom of imprisoned journalists.

---

[1] http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/23362
[2] https://hra-news.org/fa/thought-and-expression/1-1556
[3] http://iranwire.com/news/21/2645
[4] http://www.iranhrc.org/?lan=fa&p=908
[5] http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920904001044
[6] http://www.rsf-persan-org/article17365.html
[7]
http://www.dw.de/%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%B4-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%B4%D8%AF/a-17476143
[8]
http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/380599/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%B4%D8%AF
[9] http://www bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2014/04/140314_l45_ebtekar_newspaper_arret.shtml
[10] http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2014/05/140507_l51_ghanoon_newspaper_banned.shtml
[11]
http://isna.ir/fa/news/93022013391/%D8%B3%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A2%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF

[12] http://ir.voanews.com/content/mirdamadi-journalist-arrested-iran/1912153.html
[13] http://radiofarda.com/archive/news/20140515/143/143.html?id=25385179